

# LOADSTAR LETTER #25

August 1995 companion newsletter for LOADSTAR #135, the world's longest running C-64 magazine.

## CEI Announces Outrageously High-Priced Amiga. S.N.A.F.U. Ensues.

by Jeff Jones with Help from GENie's SAM Report. No C-64s mentioned yet! Early on during the fiasco that was Commodore's liquidation, it was rumored that CEI would at least continue a composite video-based monitor line, which would be beneficial to 40-column C-64 users. Well Escom came out on top in the negotiations, but CEI is still in the loop. Recently they announced that they would begin selling a new tower version of the Amiga 4000, at the exorbitant price (for an underdog computer) of \$3400. Can anyone think of a home PC priced that high? Mind you, no bundling with a jet ski or laser printer was mentioned.

On July 14, 1995, Escom stated of CEI: "There has recently been an announcement made by an American distributor about a price for the Amiga 4000T of 3500 USD. We would like to contradict this information as it has not come from one of our official press releases. There have been no firm distribution contracts or agreements signed yet for northern America. There has been no decision taken yet concerning the pricing of the Amiga 4000T in the USA."

On July 16, a spokesman for CEI denied any knowledge that Escom/Amiga Technologies had rescinded the agreement published July 6th in which CEI was appointed Amiga distributor for the Americas.

On July 17, CEI said the following: "It has become apparent the pressure exerted by the users and dealers has worked. In their latest release Amiga Technologies hints at a reconsideration of the price for the A4000T. In a faxed survey CEI dealers loudly stated their anger at the \$3500 price. CEI is pleased that the whole Amiga community mobilized and that

Amiga Technologies, unlike the former Commodore, reacted. Upon firm pricing and marketing details we will immediately let the user know."

Thanks to GENie's Amiga roundtable for this information. Their roving reporter stated that Escom has belatedly realized that the pricing policy previously announced was a formula for failure in the U.S. market and has covered its tracks by declaring that there never was a price set. CEI had conducted a survey among its many dealers, in which the key question was "how many A4000Ts can you sell at \$3500?". I saw the dealer responses... typically it was a mixture of ONE...TWO...maybe THREE. Almost every survey form included the comment "price way too high!" □

## Review: The STAR SJ-144 Heat Fusion Color Printer

By Jeff Jones. I'd never so anticipated using a new printer -- and never disliked a printer more. I don't understand how *Compute!* could have given this printer a favorable review. You've seen the ads for years now. This printer appeared a few years ago for an exorbitant \$500. Why pay \$500 for a new *iffy* printer when you could get a *real* laser printer for that price? But this new STAR printer was *color*, right? The STAR SJ-144 is a "Laser Quality" color printer. "Laser Quality" only because of its maximum DPI (dots per inch) of 360. But as far as laser uniformity goes, this printer is pales beside the average good impact dot matrix printer. In other words, if the printer were put together better, your printout would look ten times as sharp. And perhaps some units are put together better. The one I got in the mail was a disappointment. The weak link is the heat fusion technology, and the shoddy workmanship.

**And The Banding Played on!** The manual all but confesses to the STAR SJ-144's massive banding problem. The manual makes it clear that the printer allows you to adjust the amount of micro line feed from the front panel. Have you ever heard of such a setup procedure? It prints a graphic test pattern. You're supposed to increase the feed until the banding overlap disappears. Trouble was, it *never* disappeared. The only way to eliminate banding was to set the feed so high that there were actual gaps in the graphic -- which is just as bad as banding.

Fortunately the printer has a permanent memory so that if, and I repeat, *if*, you get a perfect test pattern, you can save that line feed setting so that it returns even after the printer has been turned off. I had to settle for a little banding.

As a text printer, the unit is equally unimpressive. The wide head prints about three lines at a time, which is interesting to watch, and it works pretty quietly. Clearly the letters are more sculpted than any 9-pin printer, but other than that, the printer's stunning lack of quality shines through. Flakes of those perfectly sculpted letters were missing. Typical cheap thermal transfer. Take a look at your LOADSTAR disk. Our *Rimage* copiers use a single-pass thermal transfer ribbon to copy the characters to the



## Death Is The Enemy?

label on your disks. If you want to see how the black and white output of the STAR SJ-144 looks, just run some sand paper over your label.

The process is rather simple and *should* be flawless. You have a plastic film coated with a vinyl film that you heat in order to make it stick to paper. This is sort of what happens in a laser printer, only there you have a fine plastic dust that is melted to the paper. With the heat fusion process, you generally have a single-pass opaque ribbon that is left clear after a dot has been printed. You're left with a negative image on the used ribbon.

Oddly enough, the color ribbons seem quite subdued and transparent, probably because they are multi-pass. I'm not sure. Were they opaque and single pass, the printouts (at least of primary colors) should be brilliant.

While printing in color, be prepared to wait. No, your computer hasn't crashed. It takes that long. And be prepared for the color ribbon to fast forward and rewind to the proper color. Some mixing does take place, and the printer can produce some ugly mixes, but that's true of most color printers under \$1000.

STAR sent the printer to me as a review unit years ago. I used it, hated it, and decided not to review it. Now I see it being dumped on the market for as little as \$199 through places like *Damark*. \$199? *Color*? Some of our beloved subscribers might actually bite on that. So here's a review to warn you of what you'll actually receive. The output of this printer is reminiscent of the old *Okimate 10* and *20*. Same technology. In fact I can't tell the two apart. Remember the *Okimates*? Sharp print, but with bits of characters flaked off because the transfer of film to paper was too fast, or wasn't done with enough pressure.

We did get a couple of nice color printer dumps using Super Snapshot and The Compleat Walt. But a color ribbon, which costs way over ten bucks, is gone before you know it. If you want a color printer, get a color Canon Bubble Jet or even one of STAR's older color impact dot matrix printers over this one. It's just not better.

If you want real laser quality *color*, you'll have to spend way over \$1000. There's no way around it. Maybe STAR should have bit the bullet and made the SJ-144 a \$700-\$1000 printer. Obviously they tried to keep the price down and settled around the \$500 range for starters. But there they had a terrible machine with great potential. This is obviously a machine that started on paper as a dream machine, but ended up cheapened after a few high-powered war room sessions. Honestly, this *could* have been a great printer. It is laden with great firmware features, and an impressive front panel. If

only all that razzle dazzle translated to decent output.

A color bubble jet or the older, slower, louder impact color printers are light years ahead of the STAR SJ-144. If you want laser quality, get a laser. □

## Commodore's Secret Formula For Going Out of Business

by Jeff Jones. *"Give 'em what they want"* has been the battle cry of marketers for centuries. Since the 80s, that cry has been mutated into *"Tell 'em that they need only what you have, why they need it. That'll make 'em want it, and then they'll buy it."* Commodore Business Machines went by the boneheaded creed, *"Our customers are too stupid and cheap to know what they want. Here's the menu. It won't change!"* Despite this attitude, Commodore enjoyed surprising success into the ninteies, with a billion dollar year as late as 1991. Much of that billion came from sales of 800,000 C-64 units in one year in America and mainly Germany.

But Commodore wanted to be known for its Amiga, no matter how well the C-64 sold. The Amiga would have been a killer machine, had they actually supported and pushed it. It used to produce "oohs" and "ahhs," even in the hallowed halls of Softdisk. Other computers simply *couldn't* do what the Amiga did. But over the course of a few years, The PC and the Mac changed by leaps and bounds while the Amiga began to seem more and more expensive compared to the evolving PC. Now you can get more PC than Amiga for your dollar.

So why is Commodore even in the picture? It boils down to Customer loyalty, which is odd because Commodore treated its customers and dealers like dirt. I've never felt more condescended to than when I spoke with Commodore on the phone. My friend who owns a Commodore service center hated doing business with Commodore because they didn't *pay* him for warranty work. They only credited his account for Commodore purchases -- which he wasn't making many of since he was selling many more PCs than Commodores. *That* was why Commodore service centers were so rare.

But there was one huge factor that killed Commodore, and will eventually shatter Commodore support in America: *The Wait!*

"The Wait" was the state the Commodore's fat cats were in during the last few years. They got as rich as they could, but felt with all their hearts that they couldn't compete with the PC. They were "waiting" for the moment when the

last person tossed his C-64 into the attic. Heck, even MAC people were "waiting" in the early 90s. It looked bleak for non-PCers. "The Wait" was the pessimism that I encountered when I came to Softdisk in 1988 when everyone thought that LOADSTAR would be dead in two years. I see "The Wait" in every letter and Email I receive from people who ask me if LOADSTAR is still in business.

Let's face it. Everybody *expects* 8-bit to die. Tell people that you're using a C-64 and they make faces. They just don't understand how you could find it useful. How could a computer platform *not* die when it has a reputation like that?

Well I'm proud to be part of a group of true capitalist Americans, who see a market, and point the money vacuum in that market's direction. There are still millions of Commodore users around the world. The trouble is, we have no common forum. Of the myriads of Commodore users out there, only a few thousand have even heard of LOADSTAR. Many who call LOADSTAR looking for help have never heard of CMD. In my opinion, CMD is the most happening thing in Commodore USA these days. Everyone should have an FD-2000.

CMD isn't waiting for you to switch over to the PC and drop your C-64. SSI isn't either, and neither is LOADSTAR. No, that's the last thing we want. We saw what Commodore Business Machines did: *They waited for your support to die -- and they died holding their breath.* Your support lives on. □

## Jim Brain Talks

by Jeff Jones. Jim Brain is one of those guys who can slice time. He has his own web page, handles the CBM FAQ (frequently



asked questions) file, has recently taken over C=Hacking magazine, and who knows what else. Recently I saw Jim mentioned in a rather large article in *USA Today*.

It's not often you see the Commodore mentioned anywhere nowadays. To see a picture of a CBM machine next to a picture of Jim Brain in a national paper just floored me. So I Emailed a few questions to this rising star. Here's how he handled them:

**Jeff:** I read your article in *USA Today*. I was very surprised to see it -- and surprised at

# LOADSTAR SOFTWARE VALUES!

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\* No, we didn't misspell "complete." Compleat is the ten dollar spelling of complete.

## What Is LOADSTAR?

LOADSTAR is a monthly "magazine on disk" for the Commodore 64/128. Subscribers receive two 1541 disks (or one 1581 disk) in their mailbox every month filled with news, articles and programs. These non-PD, high-quality programs are written by the best home-based programmers in the field and edited by the crack LOADSTAR team of Fender Tucker and Jeff Jones. Subscription prices are at an all-time low of \$69.95 for a 12-month subscription, or \$19.95 for a three-month subscription. You may also elect to subscribe "by the month," where we charge your credit card \$6.95 for each issue after it's shipped.

LOADSTAR's track record of over 11 years of uninterrupted publication (135 monthly issues, each available as a back issue) is unmatched by any Commodore computer magazine, disk or paper. As long as there are devoted Commodore 64/128 fans, there will be a LOADSTAR Tower. Don't miss out! Call 1-800-594-3370 and subscribe!

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your young age.

**Jim:** Well, does it change your impression of me? A young sprout I am, but I had no choice....

**Jeff:** Not at all! I'm only more impressed. Just like Kevin Thomas in our Tech support department, you're another young guy who's been around more than me. At 24, you've accomplished a lot. You'll probably speak minimally of it all in your 50s.

**Jim:** How old are you anyway?

**Jeff:** 31, going on 18 if this *Slim Fast* stuff works. In any case, what prompted the article?

**Jim:** Leslie Miller, the author of the article, was surfing the Web and ran across my WWW site at:

<http://www.msen.com/~brain/>

I don't know if she was looking for info on "orphan" computers or not, but she mailed me immediately after seeing the page asking for me to call her for an interview.

**Jeff:** Did you feel the dirty demon of digital bigotry rearing its ugly head during the interaction?

**Jim:** Actually, not with Mrs. Miller, as she is an old Commodore user. She was *ALIENNE* on *Qlink*, and met her husband there. She was amazed we had progressed so far, but was very sympathetic to Commodore users. If you read any "Commodore slamming" done in the article, it was probably as much my fault as hers, as I love my machines, but I also know they won't do everything. I think the Commodore machine has a number of advantages over other computers for

some groups of people, but I am unwilling to become a religious zealot and claim there is no other computer worthy of use. If that makes me any less of a Commodore fan, then oh well.

**Jeff:** I agree, but it can't be overstated how underrated the C-64 is. Do you feel that they left out pertinent information? For instance, I saw no mention of Creative Micro Designs (CMD) or Software Support International (SSI), which are big Commodore outlets.

**Jim:** First, I did feel some info was left out, but before we lay blame, let me answer the second question:

I gave Miller the info for CMD, PPI, SSI, LOADSTAR and a few others. I would have liked to see the info in there, but I also gave her info on all kinds of things she ended up not printing. I think, as an old Commodore user, she got caught up in the interview and then had to pare down for the size allotment she was given.

So, there are lots of things, like specifics on what we can do with our machines to supplier listings to user group contacts to speed comparisons that I felt were left out, but I am not complaining. I am just glad for the press we did receive.

**Jeff:** What has happened since the article? What's changed?

**Jim:** The WWW site usage has jumped through the roof. I track usage for the pages, and the stats, which show 150-250 hits a day for most days, jumped to 800-900 hits for a few days after and has settled into the 400-500 mark. CMD and Gaeleyn Moranec, who use my automated mail-WWW service to put their home pages up her, also showed similar increases.

**Jeff:** I dunno how this works, but does the

number of hits translate into additional change in your pocket (I hope)?

**Jim:** I wish. No, but the exposure doesn't hurt for my other business, which does Internet consulting. Mainly, it is a warm fuzzy for me, but CMD, who tracks their usage off my page, likes the numbers and for the cost, it is very good advertising.

**Jeff:** LOADSTAR has to begin monitoring its site and adding files. Our IBM guy, Dan Tobias, actually manages it. I don't have time. Frankly I haven't learned I-language yet. I've Downloaded the Big Dummy's Guide to The Internet, but I think I must be a huge dummy.

**Jim:** Better get on. I am trying to get as many CBM resources online and on the WWW as I can.

**Jeff:** What else has changed?

**Jim:** The article was reprinted in the San Jose Mercury News, as well as a newspaper initialed the IJ. I'm getting a copy, and will figure out what the initials stand for later. In addition, the Detroit News did an interview for a small piece in that paper. So, consequently, I have been swamped with email and snail mail, which has delayed the FAQ, the Trivia, and just replying. I am still getting email from the June 27th article.

The Networking effect of the article has been great. People looking to buy getting in touch with sellers, both whom came together because of the article and a quick note to me to get them connected. Users and groups thinking they were alone now realizing that there are magazines, telecommunications networks, ftp sites, BBS systems, WWW sites, and other resources for the CBM line available to utilize and add to. They now know they are not alone with their machine. □

# THE UNDERGROUND

## The 8-bit, and now Laser Printed, Commodore Mini-Mag!

The Underground is a bi-monthly publication with articles featuring reviews, PD/Shareware, BASIC and machine language tutorials, Geos, telecommunications, international stuff, news and tips. The Underground is a publication created by people who refuse to let their 8-bit computers gather dust, and is priced low enough for even the most frugal users. Try a sample issue to see if the Underground is worth your while. You'll be glad you did.

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## From LOADSTAR's BBS

17 [003] \*NRB\* "over heating..."

By: MR.SMALL @ QGB

On: Wed Jul 12, 1995 6:42 AM

LR: Fri Jul 14, 1995 8:47 AM

-- 3 Responses --

Posted On: Tue Jul 4, 1995 11:30 PM

I have a small problem with my C-64... its power supply likes to over heat quickly.... is there any thing that I can do to slow or stop it from OVER heating.. it would be helpful....

-Response #1 of 3-

By JEFF JONES-LSD1

On Thu Jul 13, 1995 2:58 PM

Subtopic: Keeping cool

You can try taking your power supply off of the carpet if it's on the floor. Move it away from other power supplies, hang it in front of your air conditioner, sit an iron skillet on top of it and use it as a heat sink.

But NOTHING will stop it from dying. It is INDEED dying. If it's fixable, get it fixed. If not, call CMD or SSI and get a new power supply. I don't know SSI's number from memory, but CMD's number is 1-413-525-0023. I also have a closet full of C-64 power supplies. If you want to make an offer, I'll listen.

-Response #2 of 3-

By BLACK SABER @ CHM

On Thu Jul 13, 1995 8:46 PM

Subtopic: Yes..

From CHMAG BBS

On Thu Jul 13, 1995 2:51 PM

The best thing to do is replace it with a heavy duty power supply. Also it could be an indication that your power supply is on it's way out. I had that problem with the first C-64 I bought. I used to cool mine off with those blue "bricks" that you put in your lunchbox to keep the drinks cold. Wrap two bricks individually in plastic, then tie them on either side of the power supply. That should buy you some time. Find out why your power supply is running hot. Are you using extra stuff (like a ram expander) that requires the use of power from your computer? Is there a short in your computer? If you haven't already done so, get a heavy-duty power supply (if you're using a 64). They barely get lukewarm, and they have power to spare.

\*\*BLACK SABER\*\*

SysOp, CHMAG BBS

Philadelphia, PA 215-242-4604

-Response #3 of 3-

By JEFF JONES-LSD1

On Fri Jul 14, 1995 8:47 AM

Subtopic: Cold Physics

It would be better to place the blue bricks on top (if the power supply has no top vents where condensation can drip in). Cold doesn't radiate. It isn't energy. It's a lack of it.

BTW, the ice does work. Even though my powersupply was one of the heavy solid

plastic ones, I once made sure that my power supply was sealed using a sealant, and used to dip it in ice water. That power supply was so bad that it would go out in two minutes. In the ice water, it would go all day. But it still finally, and suddenly died.

I DO NOT SUGGEST THAT ANYONE DO WHAT I DID WITH THE ICE WATER. HOW EVER EFFECTIVE IT WAS, IT WAS STUPID AND DANGEROUS!!!! ☐

## Turbomaster 4MHZ BBS Saga Comes to an End -- For Now

#12 User: BOATS [#204]

Date: Sun Jul 2, 1995 7:17 AM Name: JOHN SUMMA

Comp: Commodore 128

Just a question. I've been on several Image BBS's and yours is by far the fastest. Why? It prints to the screen faster, changes sections faster, in the SB section, counts and displays the messages faster. Just seems to access everything faster. Any particular reason? Curious...

Jeff: That's because I had a TurboMaster cartridge plugged in. It's not plugged in anymore because I can't get the BBS to properly network with other BBSs with the cartridge enabled. If the BBS weren't networked, I would keep the cartridge plugged in. I do still use it when I weed the boards. Cuts down to 15 minutes what would have taken over an hour. Here's why I couldn't get it to work.

By JEFF JONES-LSD1

On Mon Jul 3, 1995 12:18 AM

Subtopic: Disabling Turbomaster

I tried disabling the Turbomaster in strategic places, but there is a bigger problem with the way TurboMaster works. You can EASILY disable and re-enable by flipping bit 7 of location 0. Problem is that the disabling doesn't stick after ANY disk access. As you know, net processing is FULL of disk access.

I tried disabling after ALL disk access, but some lines in the code appear to be hidden from view. So unless Image fixes this, I guess it won't be fixed. ☐

## Advanced Online Math Self Help

4 [006] -- "Looking For MathFunc"

By: TWILIGHT @ SFB

On: Tue Apr 25, 1995 2:33 AM

LR: Fri May 12, 1995 7:05 AM

I am looking for the math function for find the distance between two xy coordinates. The descriptions of the problem is as follows:

Master Grid is 100 by 100 units This Grid is split up into a Meta-grid of 10 by 10 numbered between 00 to 99. Each number represents an xy coordinate ( X being 10s and Y Being ones ). Each XY Coordinate contains a 10 by 10 grid of the same type. An example is:

Starting point Meta-grid 55

Lesser grid 78

Ending point Meta-grid 66

Lesser grid 12

The formula numbers are:

X1 = 57, Y1 = 58 & X2 = 61, Y2 = 62

The X Coordinate difference is 4 The Y Coordinate difference is 4. What is the formula for finding the distance between the two XY Coordinates, You can use any units measurement to help, but I will need to be able to translate this into CBM Basic for incorporation into a game.

Twilight

-Response #1 of 6-

By TWILIGHT @ SFB

On Tue Apr 25, 1995 2:34 AM

Subtopic: Found it

Distance=SQR((X1-X2)^2+(Y1-Y2)^2)

in BASIC:

D=SQR ( (X1-X2) ^2+ (Y1-Y2) ^2)

To find the distance to two decimal places add.

D=INT (100\* ... )/100

D=INT (100\*SQR ( (X1-X2) ^2+ (Y1-Y2) ^2 ) )/100

Given that X1=57, X2=58, Y1=61, and Y2=62 the distance is 2.41.

-Response #2 of 6-

By ROCKET MAN @ SFB

On Tue Apr 25, 1995 3:29 AM

Subtopic: distance

Yes that will work but the Basic interpreter is very stupid. If you use (X1-X2)^2 the interpreter will use some very slow routines. Use t=X1-X2; t\*t (or (X1-X2)\*(X1-X2) ) which will be much faster and sometimes more accurate.

-Response #3 of 6-

By TWILIGHT @ SFB

On Tue Apr 25, 1995 3:29 AM

Subtopic: what?

If you look at your last statement, Rocket Man, you will find out that your problem is wrong. The solution to your problem is zero. To find distance You must take the XY differences and raise them to the power of 2 and add them together. The square of this is the distance between XY1 and XY2.

-Response #4 of 6-

By GEOFF @ ELY

On Tue Apr 25, 1995 3:29 AM

# THE COMPRESSION KIT

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## POGO STICK

The object of the game is to move about each maze fixing the out of place bricks while avoiding various obstacles. When all of the bricks have been fixed you are presented with a more difficult level. Each level contains elevators to assist in reaching the out of place bricks. There are several obstacles that endanger your pogo stick (such as pogo stunners and moving balls). Higher levels have more obstacles. Bonuses appear which add to your score and help to complete levels.

You must hurry in finishing each level because when the hour glass empties you lose a pogo stick. The game ends when you run out of pogo sticks.

Learning to play Pogo Stick will only take a couple games but getting past level 10 will take a considerable amount of practice.

Both games are fast paced and have multiple levels (the games do not end when you reach the last maze). Both games run on a standard Commodore 64 or 128 (in 64 mode). Each program is supplied on a 5 1/4 inch diskette, so a 1541, 1571 or compatible disk drive is required. The keyboard or a joystick (in either port 1 or port 2) is used to play the games.

## SUPER POGO STICK

Like Pogo Stick, the object of Super Pogo Stick is to fix all of the out of place bricks before the hour glass empties. You must avoid various obstacles to reach the out of place bricks. Bouncing your way onto bonus items can add to your score and help you to complete levels.

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- More bonuses (which include extra time and a shield).
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No, Rocket Man is correct... He only said that you need to replace the powers of two by multiplications. I.E.  $x^2$  becomes  $x*x$ . The reason is that BASIC computes logarithms in order to do exponentiation, which takes a lot of time, much more than the multiplication. If you're not interested in speed, there isn't much difference between the two, except the logarithms can introduce a little extra error into the calculation. The whole formula, using multiplications instead of powers, is:

$$D = \text{sqrt}((x2-x1)*(x2-x1) + (y2-y1)*(y2-y1))$$

**-Response #5 of 6-**  
**By TECHNICIAN @ GQB**  
On Thu Apr 27, 1995 5:40 AM  
Subtopic: R

Working on X-Y grids, the Pythagorean Theorem works fine, since everything is or can be figured as the hypotenuse or a side of a right triangle. In other applications involving other than at least one right angle, you must call up trigonometric functions. There are plenty of good algebra, geometry and trigonometry textbooks available, I only have a few, but try the library

**-Response #6 of 6-**  
**By ROCKET MAN @ SFB**  
On Fri May 12, 1995 7:05 AM  
Subtopic: correct

That is correct. Note that you are also forcing the interpreter to fetch the function parameters twice instead of just once and to perform twice as many subtractions. Something like:

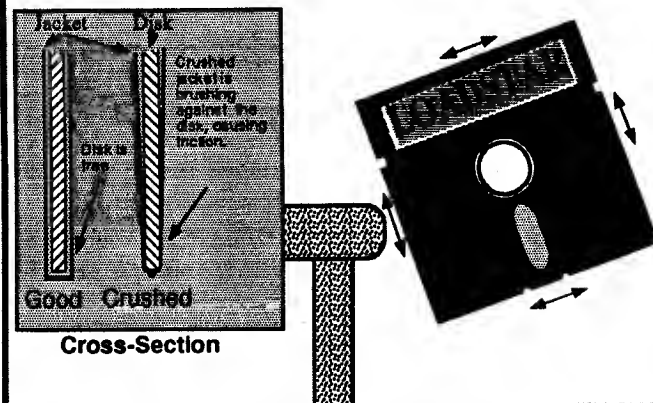
$$t1 = x2 - x1; t2 = y2 - y1$$

$$d = \text{sqrt}(t1*t1 + t2*t2)$$

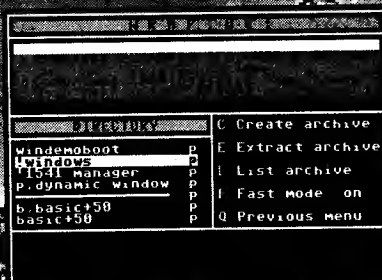
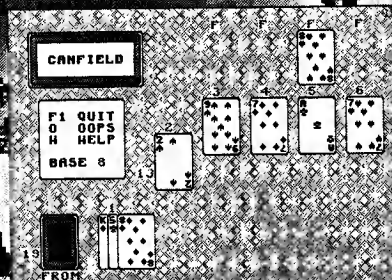
will be faster on most interpreted languages. If x and y are actually subscripted arrays, this will be significantly faster. e.g. if  $t1 = x(\#i2) - x(\#i1)$  then always do it this way. However, if you are using an optimizing compiler  $d = \text{sqrt}((x2-x1)*(x2-x1) + (y2-y1)*(y2-y1))$  will be faster because the compiler will recognize the duplication and save partial results in a register on the stack instead of fetching the numbers and subtracting again. □

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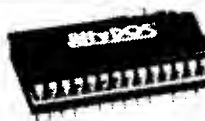
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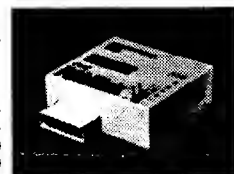
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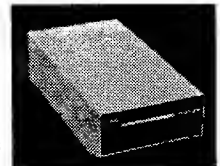
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